

# Economic Revival of West Bengal

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## Regional Development

### North West Bengal

North West Bengal has been the center of identity politics, where separatist forces and demands for separate statehood have been active for decades. It comprises eight districts: Malda, Dakshin Dinajpur, Uttar Dinajpur, Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling, Kalimpong, Alipurduar, and Cooch Behar. Despite its strategic location and availability of resources, North West Bengal has not been as developed as the regions of South West Bengal, and this, according to many scholars, is the reason behind the ethnic mobilization and the separatist tendencies that are active in this region. North West Bengal shares international borders with three South Asian states: Nepal, Bhutan, and Bangladesh. It also acts as a gateway to Northeast India as well as a corridor to China and Southeast Asian countries like Myanmar and Thailand, which highlights its potential to improve the trade and export prospects of West Bengal. Thus, it is imperative that the North West Bengal region be given due attention, and policies of economic revival must focus on exploring the potential of economic development and revenue generation in this region.

### Malda

- a. Malda is an important district in the North West Bengal region, as it ranks second in the production of raw silk in West West Bengal after Murshidabad. To provide a boost to the silk industry, an initiative to set up a silk park in Malda (since 2011) has been taken and last year the silk park was inaugurated, but a lack of investment and infrastructure still plagues the region. More private investment must be encouraged in this area. Undoubtedly, the silk park would provide a major boost to the silk industry in Malda, increasing the scope for revenue generation through exports and generating employment as well. However, the silk industry here focuses only on producing silk yarn, not silk garments. The Government must focus on setting up cloth manufacturing units.
  - i. The State Government must ensure that the factories are set up for the production of **silk garments** as well. It will not only provide a boost to the industry but also provide additional employment opportunities for the residents of Malda. The Government must encourage private investors to set up garment manufacturing mills by providing them with plots at a lower cost on a contractual basis or on lease for a small amount of money. Also, the silk textile industry can be brought under the **PLI (Production Linked Incentive)**<sup>1</sup> scheme proposed by the Central Government. It will provide the manufacturers with much-needed financial incentives to expand their manufacturing capabilities and even prove instrumental in boosting exports.

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<sup>1</sup> Production Linked Incentive <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=1932051>

- ii. The state Government should also take the initiatives to provide manufacturers and dealers with proper training and knowledge for marketing their products on **e-commerce sites**, especially Government owned websites. Here, the district administration must play a proactive role in collaboration with the NGOs and CSOs. **Special orientation and training programs** must be organized for the silk producers to enhance their techniques of production as well as introduce them to the digital platform, thereby expanding the market for their products. These measures will be beneficial in developing the local economy.
  - iii. Also, the government can endeavour to set up a laboratory in the district for conducting **research activities in sericulture**. It would help in providing new insights and ways in which the production of silk could be enhanced and new technologies that can be introduced and applied to boost the quality and quantity of silk .
- b. Malda is also known for mangoes. Mango is abundantly grown almost throughout the district, and around 250 varieties of mango are cultivated in Malda, which highlights that mango production is another important aspect of Malda's economy that can play a significant role in West Bengal's economic revival. However, despite a food park being established in Malda more than a decade ago, there have been no significant numbers of food processing units set up by the entrepreneurs who procured the land.
- i. The State Government must ensure that the entrepreneurs are provided with proper facilities to set up the food processing units in the food park. To fulfill this objective, the entrepreneurs must be provided with bank loans and other incentives. Entrepreneurs and businesses investing in this industry could be provided with **subsidized loans of up to ₹25 lakhs** and the incentives could also be in the form of cheaper electricity rates, tax benefits, etc. A major reason behind the inability of the food park in Malda to attract investors has been its lack of infrastructure and poor connectivity. The Government needs to focus on building roads connecting the food parks to the other districts of North West Bengal and the northeastern states.
  - ii. Given the large production of mangoes in Malda, the focus should be more on setting up **mango processing units**. Processing units for manufacturing pickles and chutneys from mango have been established in Malda; however, the district has immense potential for diversification, and industries related to mango, such as pulp packaging, could also be developed here. Manufacturing products like wine from mango, mango oil, mango pulp, and biscuits could be designed here.
- c. Though mango trade and silk production are the major economic activities here, small-scale industries related to **horticulture** can also help in employing women. Attention should

also be given to setting up certain smaller units of production where women are involved, such as making bari from pulses, Makhana, and other homemade products such as mango paper, etc.

- d. Since Malda is in the center of West Bengal, setting up an **airport in Malda** would enhance its connectivity and induce industrialists to set up heavy industries and MSMEs. It would also provide local businesses better access to markets outside West Bengal and even facilitate tourism in Malda.

### Dakshin Dinajpur

Dakshin Dinajpur, or South Dinajpur, is a North West Bengal district with a greater dependency on agriculture and is marked by negligible industrial development. This district is not only plagued by the problems of sloppy industrial growth and a lack of infrastructural facilities but also faces the problem of huge immigration from Bangladesh. This has exacerbated the economic woes of the district by increasing unemployment, poverty, and overpopulation, thereby impeding the economic growth of this region.

- a. Dakshin Dinajpur's primary crop is rice and hence it has 50 rice mills in the district. Given the large rice production, it has immense potential to set up Rice-Bran oil mills. The Government must ensure that the owner of the rice mills form a cooperative thereby ensuring that the raw material required for the production of **rice bran oil** is available at a lower cost. Setting up a rice bran oil mill in this district will also help in cutting the cost of production (as it will reduce the cost of transporting the raw materials), help in reducing the dependency of the population on agriculture, diversify the industrial base of the region, generate employment and also revenue.
- b. Besides rice bran, **mustard oil mills** can also be set up here given the increased production of mustard seeds in this region. An industrial park could be set up for the manufacturing, packaging and marketing of the oils produced in the region.
- c. Jute is the major fiber cash crop grown here. However, the production of **jute-diversified products** in this region is far behind its potential. For the development of jute diversified products, integrated production and marketing centers can be created. The establishment of **common production and marketing centers at Gangarampur and Banshihari** should be done so that Handicrafts, Jute Geo-textiles and Activated Charcoal from Jute sticks can be produced here.
- d. The district is drained by rivers like Atreyee, Punarbhaba, Tangon and Brahmani, highlighting that these water bodies can be utilized to develop the fishing industry. However, the fishing community here needs to be more organized.

- i. The Government must ensure that the fishing community is provided with **adequate training**, and skills, and is provided with the knowledge of using new technologies for pisciculture. Establishing fish cold storage and processing units can also enhance the potential of supplying fish to Northeastern states.
  - ii. The government has taken steps to set up laboratories at the state level to conduct **research activities in aquaculture**, provide old age pensions to fishermen under Jai Bangla Scheme, and also to provide subsidies to fishermen cooperative societies. However, the functioning of cooperatives in this District is not satisfactory. The government needs to disseminate information regarding the benefits of cooperative societies. This could be done by organizing monthly camps with the help of the BDOs for educating the fishermen in this region regarding the functioning of cooperative societies and the financial assistance to which these cooperatives will be entitled.
- e. One of the signature products of West Bengal that are facing stiff competition from the imported products of Bangladesh and is struggling for its existence is the tant industry. The tant sarees of Bangladesh are relatively cheaper than the Tant sarees produced in these regions. Gangarampur sub-division of Dakshin Dinajpur was once the hub of **Tant saree production**, which was in high demand all over India. Still, today this industry, which has immense potential to generate employment and revenue, is facing a crisis, and the major reason behind this is the lack of demand which requires appropriate marketing and promotion of Tant sarees.
- i. The Government must ensure that the tant weavers are provided with certain incentives in the form of good wages and cheaper electricity rates to carry on the production of tant sarees. The establishment of common training, production, and marketing centres for Tant craftsmen at Gangarampur and Banshihari may be made. The need is to encourage the weaver to adopt the cooperative model and facilitate the formation of **Primary Weavers Cooperative Societies (PWCS)**. The government could provide these cooperative societies with raw materials at a subsidized rate and even provide them with adequate credit facilities.
  - ii. A major issue in the handloom sector of this district is the problem of middlemen which further adds to the cost of the products. The reason behind the dependence of the weavers on the middlemen is their lack of knowledge and access to the market<sup>2</sup>. Here, the government can play a

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<sup>2</sup> Analysis of Handloom industry and its major problems In Dakshin Dinajpur of West Bengal  
[http://ijrar.com/upload\\_issue/ijrar\\_issue\\_20543062.pdf](http://ijrar.com/upload_issue/ijrar_issue_20543062.pdf)

major role by organizing **monthly markets** in this region for procuring the sarees from the weavers without any interference from the middlemen. This would not only eliminate the exploitation of the weavers but also reduce the cost of the sarees.

Thus, the Non-Industry district of Dakshin Dinajpur certainly has immense potential for industrial development. The Government needs to ensure that adequate investment in infrastructure and industrial development is made as it will add significantly to the revenue of West West Bengal.

### **Uttar Dinajpur**

Uttar Dinajpur, or North Dinajpur, is a district in North West Bengal that has a solid agricultural base but is not very developed industrially. The major reason behind its backwardness is the lack of modern technology, smooth credit, adequate power supply, etc., which is resulting in the poor industrial growth of the district. Thus, the need is to develop and strengthen the industrial infrastructure of the district. The establishment of large-scale industries will not only help increase employment but also lead to the development of ancillary industries, thereby increasing the revenue generation of the district.

- a. Uttar Dinajpur has a solid agricultural base, and almost all the blocks of the district cultivate jute, which highlights its immense potential for **jute-based industries**. The need is to diversify the products rather than confining the production to yarns and ropes of jute. The Government must encourage small and medium-scale enterprises to engage in handicraft production. It would also employ women, thereby empowering and encouraging them to start their businesses as well.
- b. Given the problems with credit facilities, the Government must ensure that credits are rolled out smoothly so that people are encouraged to set up micro and small enterprises. Government schemes must ensure that credits up to ₹2–3 lakhs are given without any collateral to provide a boost to these enterprises. Other incentives may include providing electricity at subsidized rates (₹5 instead of ₹9 per unit) and also ensuring a **regular supply of electricity** or providing land at lower rents so that the cost of production is reduced, thereby making their products more competitive in the market as compared to others.
- c. North Dinajpur is also famous for its pineapple cultivation. The soil and the climate of this district are perfect for **pineapple cultivation**, hence, enterprises for manufacturing jams, jelly, and pickles should be set up here. The Government must ensure that such manufacturing units are established near the pineapple-producing regions of Uttar Dinajpur either by private enterprises or under a public-private initiative, which would ensure that the production process is carried out effectively,

thereby increasing employment, as well as ensuring that the local pineapple cultivators also benefit from it. Given the proximity of the region to NH-34 and NH-31, these products can also be provided access to markets outside the district as well as the state of West Bengal, such as in northeast India.

- d. Spices are cultivated in an area of 4,776 Ha with the production of 21,986 Mt annually in the district. The major spices cultivated are ginger, turmeric, chilli, bay leaf, coriander, garlic, etc. This shows that not only **spice-grinding enterprises** can be established here but also the manufacturing units for the production of oil from ginger and red chilly can be established. Given the increasing demand for **ginger oil** in the world market it can also be exported.

Thus, North Dinajpur or Uttar Dinajpur has immense potential for new MSMEs, especially agro-based industries that can generate significant revenue and employment in the district. However, the problem is the lack of proper industrial infrastructure which demands urgent attention. Also, the district ranks second in West Bengal in maize production, which provides the opportunity of setting up poultry farms in Uttar Dinajpur, thereby reducing the dependence of the population on agriculture.

## Jalpaiguri

Jalpaiguri is a district in North West Bengal that is the second-largest producer of tea in West Bengal. The tea industry is the backbone of Jalpaiguri's economy. The tea industry, which includes tea processing, tea packaging, etc., provides large-scale employment in the region, thereby supporting the economy of the district. The district also has an oil refinery, and the adjacent areas of Jalpaiguri have also witnessed the growth of medicine factories, cold storage for fruits, and different other factories for electronic goods, etc. However, despite the existence of industries, the economy of the district is essentially agriculture-based. The dominant agricultural products of this district are jute, tobacco, and mustard. The need is to expand and diversify the industrial base of the district.

- a. Undoubtedly, the agricultural base of the district is strong and provides for the setting up of various **agro-based industries** such as honey production, spice grinding, fruit preservation, processing, etc. Also, the soil and the weather of the Jalpaiguri district are suitable for mushroom production, especially button mushrooms, which have a high export demand. The establishment of mushroom canning industries will help generate both revenue and employment.
- b. The district is already well known for its tea production; however, the need is for the **modernization and technological upgradation of the tea industry**, which would help in providing a boost to quality tea production as well as the

establishment of certain ancillary industries such as solvent extraction from tea waste, etc.

- c. The district also has significant **mineral deposits** such as dolomite, coal, and limestone, which makes it prospective for further industrial development. Hence, the Government must focus on developing industries in this region to extract and utilize these minerals effectively in cooperation with the locals and communities residing there.

As compared to the other districts of West West Bengal, Jalpaiguri district is quite developed and has a better industrial base. However, to boost its industrial development and expansion, the infrastructure needs to be strengthened, which requires more capital and investment, and here both the Government and the private sector have a major role to play.

## Coochbehar

Coochbehar is a district of North West Bengal that has witnessed significant growth and development in the last few years. The district has shown the highest growth among the districts of North West Bengal, and several industries have been established in this region, with the Chakchaka industrial park being the heart of the industrial activities in the district. However, the district has specific issues that need to be addressed to expedite the process of industrial development and growth.

- a. The district has a large concentration of MSMEs, but large-scale industries are absent. The focus should be on establishing medium- and large-scale enterprises, especially for **jute and steel production**, that could provide ancillary status to small industries.
- b. Being an agriculture-based district, it has several food processing units. The district has rice mills, flour mills, oil mills, and dairy product units. It also produces good-quality potatoes, jute, chilly, etc. hence, it has immense potential for food processing units such as chips, jam, sauce, jelly, etc. It is also known for its huge production of potatoes and chillies, which are also exported to Delhi and UP. Hence, food processing units related to the potato and chilli-based products like sauce, peuri, chips, pickles, etc. should be set up here.
- c. Coochbehar is also known for its massive production of jute; however, despite the availability of raw materials, its potential for the development of jute-based manufacturing units is not being fully utilized. The Government should focus on developing clusters of small and medium industries and manufacturing units for jute yarn dyeing and bleaching, jute mats, other jute-diversified products, jute particle boards, etc.



- d. Efforts are needed to **market agricultural products**. This not only requires the dissemination of relevant information to the farmers and traders by the DMI (Directorate of Marketing and Inspection) in collaboration with the WBSMB (West Bengal State Marketing Board), headed by the Agricultural Marketing Officer but also providing adequate training to the farmers. Besides, agricultural marketing also needs to be improved with proper development of rail, road, cold storage, markets, etc., and given the surplus horticultural produce of the district, activities like fruit and vegetable preservation need to be popularized.
- e. **Sericulture** is also becoming a significant part of the rural economy of Coochbehar, where the employment of women is being emphasized. However, the Government needs to ensure that self-help groups (SHGs) are encouraged to engage in sericulture activities and that credit facilities are readily available to them.
- f. Infrastructure is crucial to industrial growth and development, and roads account for 100 percent of the total transportation in Coochbehar, which implies the significance of road infrastructure. However, except for the national and state highways, the **condition of the roads is dismal**, which increases the cost of transportation of raw materials and finished products. This requires not only proper maintenance of the roads but also the construction of new roads to boost connectivity and reduce the cost of transportation. This can be done under the MGNREGA program as well.

## Darjeeling

Darjeeling is a district of North West Bengal famous for its scenic beauty. It is known for its tea and tourism industries. It produces 7% of India's total tea output, with around 60% of workers in the tea gardens being women. Besides the famous tea industry, Darjeeling is also famous as a tourist destination, attracting tourists from various parts of India as well as from outside the country. 'Queen of the Hills,' as Darjeeling is commonly known, has the potential to become a prime tourist destination but also has immense scope for industrial development.

- a. Apart from tea, certain parts of Darjeeling are also famous for **pineapples**. Bidhannagar is an area 40 km away from Siliguri, known as the capital of the pineapple, with an annual pineapple production of around 0.6 million metric tonnes. It is cultivated on 20,000 hectares of land. The region contributes to around 80 percent of West West Bengal's total output, which is nearly half the country's 2 million MT yield. Industries manufacturing jam, jelly, pickles, squash, Osmo-dehydrated products, etc. from pineapple can be readily set up in this area. It would help in the creation of a well-defined market and support both the local pineapple growers and the entrepreneurs setting up enterprises.

- b. As mentioned above, the tea industry is the backbone of Darjeeling's economy. Tea, being a significant industry, provides for the growth of the tea packaging and processing industries. Also, industry related to the machinery required for manufacturing tea can be established under Public-Private Partnerships to supplement the economic development of this region.
- c. Darjeeling produces around 20,000 metric tonnes of oranges and 80,000 metric tonnes of tomatoes annually. Besides, 6,00,000 oranges per day are available from Sikkim during the peak season<sup>3</sup>. Given the **massive resources of raw fruits**, a food park or an integrated plant can be established for producing items like orange marmalade, tomato sauce, frozen fruits, etc.
- d. Darjeeling Hills are also known for countless orchids like Cymbidium, Vanda, Dendrobium, Paphiopedilum, etc. Floriculture, thus, becomes an essential aspect of the Darjeeling hills. However, floriculture, despite having export potential, is still the most unorganized sector. The Government needs to ensure that the farmers are provided with **adequate training and orientation programs** regarding the use of modern technologies along with their traditional methods to boost commercial floriculture in Darjeeling.

## Alipurduar

Alipurduar district was created in 2014 after the bifurcation of Jalpaiguri district. The main resources of this district are tea, timber, and dolomite. The only industry in this district is the tea plantation and processing industry.

- a. Alipurduar district, though industrially backward, is rich in agriculture and forestry production. Evergreen trees, valuable timber, and certain medicinal plants are found in the forest of this district. The Government must explore the prospects of establishing **forest products and agro-based industries here**. A committee comprising the block development officers, agriculture officers, and panchayat heads should be established to identify the establishment of prospective agro-based and forestry MSMEs such as wooden furniture, mushroom canning, jams, jellies, pickles, etc. The participation of the local community must be encouraged, capitalizing on the knowledge that the local people have about the forest areas.
- b. Agriculture is the main occupation, and the district has surplus production in paddy, potatoes, jute, and vegetables. The focus should be more on proper land utilization, the adoption of modern agro-techniques, and adequate training for the farmers to incorporate these methods into their agricultural practices. Moreover,

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<sup>3</sup> Darjeeling Industrial Profile  
<https://www.indiangorkhas.in/2014/02/potential-industries-in-darjeeling.html>

the development of an **organized marketing system** is necessary for the proper distribution of agricultural produce.

### Jangalmahal Area

The districts along the western border of West West Bengal—Bankura, Purulia, Jhargram, and Paschim Medinipur—are commonly referred to as the Jangalmahal area. It comprises 54 backward blocks, with one-fifth of the area covered by forest. The region is deficient in water resources, and the problem is exacerbated by erratic monsoons, which also adversely impact agriculture.

- a. **Purulia** district is a drought-prone area marked by acute water shortages and rough, shallow soil with very low water holding capacity, which makes it an area unsuitable for agriculture. The district has large mineral deposits of coal, iron ore, china clay, feldspar, etc., which have been instrumental in setting up large-scale industries in the steel, cement, and power sectors. However, the district is still industrially backward, and the major reason behind this is the lack of industrial expansion and diversification and the absence of upgraded technology.
  - i. Addressing these issues requires adequate investments in industries and technological upgrades, which demand the involvement of the private sector. Given the rich mineral base of the district, there is huge scope for investment in **mineral-based industries** such as granite cutting and polishing, quartz dust, etc. The Government must create an ‘ecosystem’ for facilitating industrial development in the form of adequate infrastructure, especially political stability, and security.
  - ii. West Bengal is known for MSMEs, and Purulia has more than 2000 registered MSME units<sup>4</sup>. There is further scope for expanding the sector; however, the major issue in this sector is the inadequate flow of credit, both term loans and working capital<sup>5</sup>. Even though the Government has launched schemes such as the Youth Credit Card<sup>6</sup> to facilitate the setting up of MSMEs, there is a lack of awareness among the people about such schemes, and awareness could be increased through organizing

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<sup>4</sup> MICRO SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES IN WEST BENGAL: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY  
<https://www.ijrar.org/papers/IJRAR1944795.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> District-wise Disparity of MSME in West Bengal  
[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/323260475\\_District-wise\\_Disparity\\_of\\_MSME\\_in\\_West\\_Bengal](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/323260475_District-wise_Disparity_of_MSME_in_West_Bengal)

<sup>6</sup> West Bengal Budget: Youth Credit Card boost for start-ups  
<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/kolkata/west-bengal-budget-youth-credit-card-boost-for-startups/articleshow/97965326.cms>

entrepreneurship awareness campaigns in districts that have the potential to set up MSMEs.

- b. **Bankura** is one of the backward districts of West Bengal. Its economy is an agrarian-based one with a low level of industrialization. Given the slow pace of industrial development, unemployment has been a major issue of concern here, which triggers the migration of the labour force from Bankura to the eastern district of West Bengal. Addressing this problem demands less dependence on agriculture and the setting up of industries that could absorb the surplus labour available here.
- i. Bankura is rich in mineral deposits like copper, tungsten, mica, and especially coal. Minerals and mining play a vital role in the economy of Bankura, and blocks like Chhatna, Saltora, Khatra, Ranibandh, Bankura, Indpur, and Raipur are most important for setting up **mineral-based industries**.
  - ii. Agriculture accounts for 70% of the district's income; hence, it has the potential for the establishment of micro and small agro-based industries such as rice mills, flour mills, potato chip wafers, etc.
  - iii. Also, 21% of the district is covered with forests, which are covered with rare plants and animals. The Government should endeavour to form a committee consisting of the members of the forest department in cooperation with the local NGOs and panchayat members to organize **awareness campaigns**, plantation programs, etc. to harness the potential of the forest areas. Forest-based industries such as cups and plates made from sal leaves, silk rilling, waiving, etc.
  - iv. Also, the climate of Bankura is suitable for the **production of lac**, which has the potential to become a major export item. Capitalizing on favourable climatic conditions, the Government must ensure that the farmers engaged in lac production are provided with adequate monetary support in the form of credit and insurance and material support in the form of good-quality brood lac, etc. The Government should provide training to people, especially women, in making lac products like bangles and paperweights, which can provide them with an additional source of income. Furthermore, this can improve the condition of SHGs significantly and provide access to credit for establishing small and micro enterprises. Lac production will not only help in improving the condition of the tribals but also reduce the dependence of the people on agriculture, as it can provide

support to certain ancillary industries such as automobile polishes, bottle sealers, etc., and conserve forest resources as well.

- v. The **handicrafts and handloom industry** of Bankura are famous for Dokre, wood carvings, stone carvings, Baluchari sarees, bamboo works, and potta-chitras can be provided a major boost if the Government deals with them directly by organizing weekly markets for these products as well as promoting their products on online platforms thereby protecting them on by the mediators.
- c. The district of **Jhargram** was formed after bifurcation from Paschim Mednipur in 2017. It was created as the 23rd district of West West Bengal. The district which was once plagued by the problem of Maoist insurgencies and political turbulence has gained political stability. However, the district dominated by the tribal population is still underdeveloped.
    - i. Jhargram is an area near Kharagpur which has a strong industrial base. The given proximity of Jhargram to Kharagpur provides wide possibilities for the development of ancillary industries based on the requirements of small and large-scale enterprises in Kharagpur., especially the industries related to iron and steel production. The Government must focus on developing industries such as steel furniture or body building of motor vehicles which can help in generating employment in the region as well help in its industrial growth. Training camps must be set up to provide adequate training to the people required to work in such industries.
    - ii. Several **small service sector units** such as Xerox centres, driving schools, PCO/STD centres, catering services, etc. can also be established.
  - d. **Paschim Mednipur** is a district of the Jangalmahal region that has one of the largest industrial setups in West Bengal. However, the dependence on agriculture is still high in the district, as industrial development has taken place mainly in the Kharagpur Block.
    - i. The district has surplus production of jute, paddy, potatoes, and vegetables. The requirement is proper agro-techniques and smart farming, such as the use of **zero-tillage machines**, that can enhance the growth and production of the agricultural sector. The establishment of warehouses and cold storage can also provide a boost to agricultural growth.
    - ii. Also, the district has immense potential for setting up **ancillary industries** that can manufacture items required by the industries in Kharagpur, Debra, Nimpura, and Salbani.

- e. The districts falling under the Jangalmahal region have a common problem of underdevelopment. The **Jangalmahal Action Plan** was initiated in 2014–15, but the funds allocated under the plan have been reduced since then. The Government must constitute a Jangalmahal Development Board, which would focus on the holistic development of the region, focusing on providing training and employment to the local people in the region, improving irrigation techniques, providing advanced agricultural machinery on rent to the farmers, etc. The development board must work on the basis of the reports sent by a committee comprising BDOs and panchayat heads. The development board, in return, shall present its report to the governor. The audit records of the funds allocated to the development board must be maintained to ensure accountability.

## Sundarbans

The Sundarbans are the largest mangrove forest reserve in the world and have also been declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site. It is densely populated with 42 lakh people residing there. It is also a source of livelihood for several communities living there. The indigenous plants, honey extraction, and catching fish from rivers, lakes, and rivulets have good economic value in the surrounding markets. However, the region is plagued by acute poverty, unemployment, hunger, illiteracy, poor health, and poor well-being. The cyclonic storm Amphan in 2020, followed by the COVID-19 pandemic, further exacerbated the problems in the Sundarbans.

- a. A major problem in the Sundarbans is the **regular flooding and overflow of estuarine rivers**, which damages human settlements and submerges crops<sup>7</sup>. Due to this, the locals are forced to engage in fishing, which ultimately results in the depletion of the fish population, thereby triggering the migration of male members of the family from the Sundarbans. The use of mechanized trawlers and the increasing salinity of the soil are also reasons behind this problem. The Government needs to understand that the use of trawlers would eventually exhaust the fishing resources of the Sundarbans. The local people have better ideas and knowledge about the place; hence, they must be involved in fishing activities.
- b. Being prone to frequent cyclones, as evident in the cyclones that have hit Sundarbans like Aila in 2009 and Amphan in 2020, which have caused massive destruction, the Government needs to focus on **disaster management**. The Government must focus on constructing breach-resistant, concrete-reinforced earthen embankments. The benefits of the creation of such embankments include protection from the annual floods, which would expand the opportunities for

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<sup>7</sup> Poverty, State Apathy, and Resource Exploitation Afflicts Indian Sunderbans  
<https://www.newsclick.in/Poverty-State-Apathy-Resource-Exploitation-Afflicts-Indian-Sunderbans>

employment, save on flood relief expenditure, reduce the migration of rural poor to urban centres, and give a sense of security to the inhabitants. The construction of embankments can be done under the MGNREGA scheme, which would also provide employment to the locals. The creation of breach-resistant embankments is imperative for the economic upliftment of the Sundarban region.

- c. Given the diversity of flora and fauna in the district, as well as the famous Royal West Bengal Tiger, found here, the prospects of developing the tourism sector are very high. However, the need is for the development of proper infrastructure in the form of adequate transport facilities and accommodation. The Government must focus on developing the tourism sector of the Sundarbans, which can provide people with alternative employment opportunities, but also lay emphasis on tourism marketing, as tourism can certainly play a significant role in strengthening the local economy.
- d. The **Sundarbans Development Board** must be provided with a 'fund' dedicated to the development of Infrastructure in the Sundarbans. The audit report of the money allocated in the fund must be maintained and submitted to the CAG.

## Major Industries

### Tea Industry

India is the second-largest producer of tea in the world, and the two major tea-producing states in India are West West Bengal and Assam. However, the current scenario of the tea industry is dismal, despite the fact that it has immense potential to earn crucial export income and foreign exchange. Being a labour-intensive industry, it also has the capacity to generate employment, but the tea industry in West West Bengal, especially in Darjeeling, is facing an acute crisis today.

- a. A major problem in the tea industry is the **higher cost of production and stagnant prices**. Resolving the issue of the unremunerative price of tea demands that a floor price for green leaf and made tea, indexed to the cost of production be declared by the central Government.
- b. Given the declining crop production in Darjeeling and Dooars, a committee has been formed to suggest measures for the revival of the tea industry in Darjeeling. This committee must also focus on the small tea growers who make a significant contribution (around 50 percent) to crop production.
  - i. The rising cost of tea production is one of the major reasons behind the declining tea industry in West Bengal. This requires a total revamp of the tea estates in Darjeeling and other regions of North West Bengal, most of which are old in comparison to the tea gardens of Assam and Sri Lanka.

**New technologies** that focus on mechanized tea harvesting need to be aggressively promoted to cut the cost of production.

- ii. Providing **electricity** at subsidized rates can also help in reducing the cost of production.
- iii. Another challenge faced by the tea industry of West Bengal, especially Darjeeling tea, is the **import of substandard tea from Nepal**<sup>8</sup>, which is being exported to other countries under the label of Darjeeling tea. This is not only deteriorating the image and reputation of Darjeeling tea but also decreasing the demand for tea in India. Addressing this issue requires rules setting up standards and strict quality checking of tea being imported from Nepal and those being exported from India. The Government must also seek to levy import duties on tea leaves from Nepal, which are currently imported duty-free.
- c. Another threat is the tea estates being shut down for months because of the **Gorkhaland movement and absenteeism among the workforce**. The workers are not willing to work in tea gardens because of the low wages. The Government must ensure that the workers are provided with adequate wages and proper housing facilities. Land rights are a major cause of agitation among the workers. The Government could address this issue by setting up a Tea Workers Welfare Fund Assisted Housing Scheme to provide the tea workers with housing facilities.

## Jute Industry

The jute industry is one of the oldest industries in West Bengal and is currently in disarray. West Bengal is the hub of India's jute industry, with around 70 of the 93 jute mills in India. It has immense potential for providing employment and support to other industries; hence, the revival of the jute industry is essential for improving the revenue generation of West Bengal.

- a. A major issue facing the jute industry is the **high procurement costs** of raw jute because mill owners have to deal with middlemen rather than buy raw jute from farmers. It is for this reason that final output is sold at higher rates, thereby reducing its competitiveness in the international market. Eliminating the middlemen is imperative, and this could be done if the Government ensures that Jute Procurement Centres are established near the jute-growing areas. The jute growers must also be educated about forming self-help groups so that they can

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<sup>8</sup> Tea Inc cries foul as import from Nepal jumps 90% in '22  
<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/kolkata/tea-inc-cries-foul-as-import-from-nepal-jumps-90-in-22/articleshow/98619773.cms?from=mdr>



directly deal with the jute mill owners and traders. The Government must collaborate with the NGOs to achieve this objective.

- b. The Government should also focus on the **modernization of the jute industry**, ensuring that adequate machinery required for jute cultivation is manufactured and made available to farmers. These machines can be developed under the public-private partnership model. These machines must be made available to the farmers at subsidized rates, or credit must be provided for procuring these machines. Modernization of the jute industry is imperative for enhancing both the quality and quantity of jute production.
- c. Around 46 jute mills have been closed in the last decade, with one of the major reasons behind this being the discontent among the jute mill workers regarding low wages and accommodation facilities. The Government, in collaboration with the Centre, can construct **labour colonies**, where houses would be provided to the mill workers at lower rents. Also, establishing Government schools near such mills would act as an incentive for the mill workers to continue working in the jute mills.
- d. Making jute packaging for food items would also prove beneficial in providing a boost to the jute industry. The Government can initiate schemes such as providing subsidies to industries that package their products in jute bags and ensuring that food processing industries have tie-ups with manufacturing units that produce jute sacks.

## Flower Industry

The agro-climatic conditions, soil, and availability of water in West Bengal make it suitable for floriculture. The major flower-producing areas in West Bengal and flower-producing districts in West West Bengal are Purba Medinipur, Nadia, Howrah, Darjeeling, and North 24 Parganas. Given the growing commercial and economic use of flowers, floriculture as an industry has huge prospects for raising West Bengal's revenue.

- a. The floriculture industry is also plagued by the problem of middlemen and Mahajan<sup>9</sup> (a term used to refer to a dealer or a moneylender), who exploit the flower cultivators. The Government must focus on establishing an exclusive market with the required infrastructural facilities to address this issue.
- b. Flower cultivation requires the careful **selection of high-yielding plants** and agronomic practices. However, most of the flower growers are uneducated and are not provided with the adequate training and knowledge required for increasing the quality and quantity of production.
  - i. Flower cultivation in certain areas, such as Purba Mednipur, is still traditional; hence, the introduction of modern technology becomes

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<sup>9</sup> Mahajan <https://en.banglapedia.org/index.php/Mahajan>

essential. The farmers need to be provided with adequate training regarding using advanced technology for flower management.

- ii. There is also a lack of information regarding the availability of new varieties, and demand for flowers in national and international markets leads to inadequate planning of production for domestic and export markets. Awareness programs must be organized to popularise flower cultivation and **disseminate relevant information about market demand through seminars, demonstrations, flower shows, and exhibitions.**
- c. The small, marginal farmers who have no surplus money to avail themselves of different kinds of inputs must be provided with insurance and credit facilities. The Government should take the initiative to provide loans to small farmers who have less than 1 acre of land.
- d. The absence of a **cold storage facility** also needs to be addressed. The Government must establish cold storage units so that the flowers could be preserved for a long time while their quality remains intact. Cold storage facilities can be provided under the public-private partnership model, or subsidies could be offered to set up cold storage facilities.
- e. The Government should establish two flower processing and exporting hubs around airports to promote branding, packaging, and domestic and international marketing of flowers.

## **Fisheries**

One of the primary industries in West Bengal, which not only provides employment to lakhs of people but is also a primary source of export income, is the fishing industry. The fisheries sector also stimulates the growth of several subsidiary industries in West Bengal, where fish are cultivated in every kind of water body, i.e., brackish water, sweet water, sewage water, and marine water. The government has also taken several steps to boost this industry, such as preserving precious water resources under the "Jal Dharo Jal Bharo" scheme, an old age pension scheme for fishermen, and providing grants to primary and central fishermen cooperative societies. However, the fisheries sector of West Bengal faces specific issues that demand resolution to expand its potential.

- a. The government can develop **Special Fisheries Zones** in Digha and Sundarbans following the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model and in consultation with the local fishermen cooperatives. It should be done after conducting an Environmental Impact Assessment.

- b. The rising cost of gasoline and diesel has been a primary cause of concern for fishermen who own trawlers. The government must ensure that the fishermen are given ₹11000 for every 1000 litres of petrol used in the trips made by the trawlers.

## Infrastructure

### Roads

- a. Given the strategic location of West Bengal and its proximity to the Northeast, the Government must work in close collaboration with the central Government to expedite the construction of the **Tetulia corridor** connecting Chopra in North Dinajpur to Mainaguri in Jalpaiguri district through the Tetulia Upazila in Bangladesh. This would reduce the travel length of all North East India-bound vehicles by over 85 km cutting down transportation costs significantly.
- b. With the development of the Tajpur seaport, its connectivity with industrially developed areas like Kharagpur and Durgapur becomes important. Hence, the Government must ensure that the **Durgapur expressway is extended to Tajpur** as well as connected with the highway connecting Kharagpur and Durgapur.
- c. A separate fund should be allocated for the development of state highways. This fund should be used for widening the state highways, making them 4 lanes wherever necessary.

## Tourism

Tourism is a sector that can contribute significantly to the growth and development of a region both in terms of revenue and employment. The state of West Bengal not only has abundant natural resources but also a rich cultural heritage making it a prime tourist destination. While Darjeeling, Sandakphu, and the Sundarbans are the most preferred destinations in West Bengal, it has immense potential for developing other regions as prime tourist spots and diversifying its tourism industry.

- a. The Gaur and Pandua regions of the **Malda district** have immense potential for attracting tourists but these have not been well developed. The historic ruins of Gaur, particularly the Barasona Mosque, Dakhil Darwaza, Lattan Mosque, and Qadam Rasul Mosque Government must focus on improving the infrastructure and connectivity in this region. It must invest in improving accommodation facilities and food joints. Enhancing connectivity

via roads and railways is imperative for attracting private investors to set up hotels and restaurants in this region.

- b. Another major district that can play a cardinal role in the tourism industry of West Bengal is the **Jalpaiguri** district, which also has eco-tourism potential. Given the geographical location of Jalpaiguri, a **Tourism Park** could be set up here at Jaigaon, which would provide facilities for recreational activities like rafting, paragliding, aerial surveying, ropeway connections, and helicopter facilities to the surrounding tourist places.
- c. West Bengal is known for worshipping Shakti (Goddess Durga), and the Government should capitalize on this to promote spiritual tourism. A separate fund should be allocated for developing a Shaktipeeth circuit, including all 13 Shaktipeeths of West Bengal. The provision of drinking water facilities, food kiosks, Dharamshala, and other modern facilities for the convenience of pilgrims must also be focused upon.
  - i. Also, certain religious places in West Bengal can be brought under the Center's PRASHAD<sup>10</sup> (Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual Heritage Augmentation Drive) Scheme. Currently only Belur Math<sup>11</sup> has been provided with funds under this scheme. The State Government should provide proposals to the centre for the development of religious places like the Tantric town of Tarapith or the Taraknath Temple in Hooghly district's Tarakeswar.
- d. The **Jangalmahal** area, given its rich forest and natural resources, can become a destination for **eco-tourism**. The Government can set up a committee to identify such regions having the potential for eco-tourism. The strategies for the promotion of eco-tourism must involve the locals of those areas who have a better knowledge of the forest regions. They must be provided with adequate training as tourist guides through workshops or certain short-term courses on tourism could be provided to them.
- e. Marketing tourism is crucial for the development of the tourism industry, as is evident in the growth of the tourism industry in Kerala and Gujarat; however, West Bengal has lagged far behind in this aspect. The Government must engage in **aggressive marketing and promotional activities**. It could be done by organizing road shows and campaigns in various cities and using digital platforms extensively for advertising tourism, such as digital hoardings in other cities, to attract tourists.

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<sup>10</sup> "National Mission on Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual Heritage Augmentation Drive (PRASHAD) <https://byjus.com/govt-exams/prasad-scheme/>

<sup>11</sup> Bengal tourism infrastructure development sluggish: Official [https://www.business-standard.com/article/news-ians/bengal-tourism-infrastructure-development-slug-gish-official-118080701486\\_1.html](https://www.business-standard.com/article/news-ians/bengal-tourism-infrastructure-development-slug-gish-official-118080701486_1.html)

## Conclusion

West Bengal was one of the richest states in India back in the 1960s, however, the current economy and the financial health of the state reveal that West Bengal today is included in the impoverished states of India. The degradation of West Bengal's economy has been attributed to several factors, but the major reason has been the state's high dependence on agriculture and medium-sized industry marked by a downslide in heavy industries. The state is plagued by high debt burden and low revenue generation, though the rate of unemployment is low but the **majority of the workforce is employed in the informal sector**. Moreover, the policies of transfers and subsidies without any strong industrial base has added to the debt burden of West Bengal. This makes industrial development imperative for economic revival of the state. Hence, the government must steer its policies appropriately, laying strong foundations for industrialisation and providing gainful employment to the people in the state.

This paper has focused mainly on the industrial development of West Bengal providing a district-wise analysis and recommendations for enhancing industrial productivity and revenue generation of the state. It has focused primarily on the districts of the North West Bengal region and the Jangalmahal areas which are extremely lagging behind in industrial development. It also focuses on the major industries of West Bengal which have the potential of generating the much needed export income and finally it provides recommendations on developing the tourism industry. The government has recently announced that it expects to attract around ₹10000 crores<sup>12</sup> in the North West Bengal region in the next 3-5 years. However, realising this expectation and turning it into a reality demands that a business friendly climate, effective infrastructure and most importantly political stability is maintained in the region.

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<sup>12</sup> North Bengal to attract Rs 10,000 cr investment in next 3-5 years  
<https://www.deccanherald.com/national/north-bengal-to-attract-rs-10000-cr-investment-in-next-3-5-years-1082644.html>

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